

ROLE AND MISSION
of the
North Atlantic Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Host University



Partner University



Founding Federal Partners



Draft Date:

November 22, 1999

Introduction: CESUs; A New University-Federal Collaborative

The North Atlantic Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) was established in June 1999 by cooperative agreement between agencies of the Department of the Interior (National Park Service and USGS Biological Resources Division) and the University of Rhode Island, with its partner institution, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

The North Atlantic Coast CESU is part of a national network of biogeographic programs being established to provide research, technical assistance, and education to federal land management, environmental and research agencies. CESUs will generate collaborations among federal managers and policy-makers, federal researchers, and the academic community. Each partner brings a different perspective and wealth of technical knowledge allowing for the development of new, innovative and creative solutions to the myriad of environmental and social issues that confront our nation's ecosystems. Host universities are selected by a highly competitive process insuring that each CESU is founded on scientific excellence. Four initial CESUs have been established, with more to follow.

The University of Rhode Island, a national leader in the study of coastal and marine ecosystems, was selected as host for the North Atlantic Coast CESU. University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a Historically Black College, offers a strong complement of marine and coastal scientists. Moreover, excellent research and cooperative education opportunities will be available for students from diverse backgrounds, for the mutual professional benefit of students and the federal workforce.

Biogeographic Scope and Issues-Oriented Focus of the North Atlantic Coast CESU

The geographic scope of the CESU includes the North Atlantic coastal zone from Maine to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. CESU activities will encompass all ecosystems of coastal watersheds, including barrier islands, estuaries, nearshore oceanic environments, salt and

freshwater wetlands, coastal ponds, plus terrestrial watersheds and processes that affect the coastal environments.

The Department of the Interior has many holdings along the North Atlantic coast from Maine to Virginia (Include Map). Just within the National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service, there is one National Park, three National Seashores, two National Recreation Areas, one National Preserve, and numerous National Wildlife Refuges. Other federal agencies also manage extensive land areas within the northeast coastal zone. Increasing urbanization and an expanding recreationally oriented public has exacerbated potential threats to these northeast coastal ecosystems. This has increased the demand for high-quality science, usable and concise information for resource managers, and responsive technical assistance.

The CESU will focus on the management of Department of the Interior lands and other federal lands that lie in the increasingly urban and suburban coastal zone. Some examples of critical issues confronting the management of federal lands follow:

- Shoreline erosion
- Nutrient enrichment and eutrophication
- Accelerated sea level rise and climate change
- Exotic species expansion
- Overexploitation of renewable resources
- Vector-borne diseases and insect pests
- Loss of habitat quality and biodiversity

Projects of the North Atlantic Coast CESU will endeavor to understand the fundamental ecosystem processes that are affected by a particular issue, to develop resource management solutions based on sound science and an appreciation for societal needs, and to monitor the effectiveness of those solutions. This will require multidisciplinary teams of natural scientists, social scientists, and managers. The CESU provides the perfect suite of partners for implementing the team approach.

Role and Mission

The North Atlantic Coast CESU is charged with conducting coastal research, providing technical assistance, providing opportunities for education, and enhancing partnerships and cooperative approaches for addressing issues faced by federal land managers. The North Atlantic Coast CESU will entail collaborations between the university partners and federal agencies with substantive active participation by the federal agencies in research and other CESU activities.

Research Mission

- Identify and describe critical research needs for federally managed lands.
- Establish research priorities based on the needs of federal resource managers.
- Conduct research within the North Atlantic Coast biogeographic region.
- Apply research results to support the preservation, management and restoration of North Atlantic Coast ecosystems.
- Monitor the success of resource preservation, management and restoration efforts.

Technical Assistance Mission

- Identify and describe the critical technical assistance needs of federal land managers.
- Provide technical assistance, training, planning support, and other needed services for federal resource managers in a way that is timely and relevant to their critical needs.

Cooperative Education Mission

- Establish cooperative education/internship positions for undergraduate and graduate-level students.
- Encourage the professional development of federal scientists and managers involved in the CESU.
- Provide opportunities for technical training of federal scientists and managers.

Partnership/Collaboration

- Encourage participation by other federal research and management agencies and universities involved in coastal programs.
- develop collaborative approaches for establishing research & management priorities
- facilitate collaboration to enhance the generation, synthesis, and use of scientific information for the resolution of critical coastal issues

Administration & Operation

The research, technical assistance, education and partnership missions of the North Atlantic Coast CESU will be under the direction and guidance of a Managers Committee, as stipulated in the cooperative agreement. The committee will serve the following functions:

- Prepare a multi-year strategic plan – a document that guides the general direction and fundamental focus of the CESU program.
- Prepare annual work plans, providing specific research projects, technical assistance activities, training opportunities, and cooperative education ventures that will be undertaken.
- Coordinate technical peer review of CESU research products.
- Seek participation of other federal research and management agencies and partner universities as the North Atlantic Coast CESU program develops.

The North Atlantic Coast CESU managers committee will reside with the host institution, the University of Rhode Island, and will include representatives from the University of Rhode Island, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, the National Park Service, and the USGS-Biological Resources Division. Other agencies and partner academic institutions can be added to the CESU, and the Managers Committee, by cooperative agreement. The Managers Committee will meet annually, or at a greater frequency as needed. The host institution will maintain and distribute minutes of each Managers Committee meeting. Managers Committee meetings are not restricted to formal members of the Committee. Invitations to attend may be extended to representatives from other federal agencies and universities.

The CESU is intended to provide direct contacts between federal agency scientists, federal managers, and university researchers. The USGS currently has coastal scientists who are duty-stationed at URI, each with collateral duties focused on the CESU. The National Park Service expects to place a scientist at URI, completely dedicated to CESU functions. In addition, senior level National Park Service natural resource management professionals are duty-stationed at URI, and it is expected that they will participate in CESU activities. Federal scientists and managers who are in residence at the university are expected to provide valuable services to the university, including support and mentoring of graduate students, teaching, collaboration with university faculty, staff, and students on CESU projects, participation in academic department activities, and active involvement in the overall intellectual atmosphere of the university.

The CESU will maintain a modest staff to coordinate and plan meetings and workshops, to address administrative matters, to draft written documents for the Managers Committee, and to perform other functions as determined necessary by the Managers Committee.

Funding for CESU activities will be administered by modification to the establishing cooperative agreement which was fully executed on 18 June 1999 between the USGS-Biological Resources Division, the National Park Service, the University of Rhode Island and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. The agreement is in effect for a period of five years and can be continued for another 5 years by mutual consent of the participating parties. Near the end of the initial five-year period, the CESU Working Group, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, will conduct a technical review of North Atlantic Coast CESU accomplishments.